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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR NEA/ARPI, G/TIP
DEPT FOR DOL (JSHEA)
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SUBJECT: OMAN OFFERS OVERSTAYERS AN EASY EXIT

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) In an effort to spur the exit of expatriates who have overstayed their visas, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) eased departure regulations and urged all persons on expired visas to pay a one-time fee of \$655 USD and depart the country without hindrance by August 19. The offer did not apply to foreigners who entered Oman illegally. Although the government widely advertised the initiative, officials at the Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Indian embassies say that relatively few of their nationals took advantage of the offer, opting to hope for something better in the future. End Summary.

Bargain

2. (U) In early August, the ROP eased departure regulations for the estimated 50,000 expatriates believed to be in Oman on expired tourist visas, urging all those on expired visas to depart the country by August 19 after paying a one-time fee of \$655. The steep reduction in fees, normally set at \$26 per day beyond expiry of a visa, was meant to be a strong incentive, especially for those visitors who have overstayed their visa by a year or more and conceivably owe over \$9500 in fines.

Seeking a Better Deal

3. (SBU) Although the ROP's initiative represents a potentially significant discount for long-term overstayers, many expatriates are unable to raise the necessary money and accompanying airfare home. In an attempt to promote timely and legal departure, an official from the Bangladeshi Embassy said that his government negotiated an even lower fee of \$131 for first-time offenders. In effect since September 2004, the ROP has granted reduced exit fees to over 2000 Bangladeshis, while another 1000 repeat offenders paid the \$655 fine.

4. (SBU) Pakistani officials are attempting to negotiate a reduced exit fee for their nationals as well. According to one Embassy official, no more than 20-30 Pakistanis have come forward to take advantage of the current program. Since most out-of-status Pakistanis entered the country illegally, the easy-exit program is of little relevance.

5. (SBU) The Indian Embassy, whose nationals could be the largest beneficiary of the easy-exit plan, has no firm figures on those who departed before the August 19 deadline. It estimates, however, that more than 8,000 Indians are currently in Oman on expired visas. Indians constitute the largest percentage of Oman's foreign population.

Comment

6. (SBU) While the easy-exit program should appeal to those expatriates stuck in Oman on expired visas, it does nothing to facilitate repatriation of those who entered illegally. Moreover, most expatriates on expired visas tend to be poor working-class South Asians who would find it difficult to raise airfare and pay any amount in overstay fines. It appears that most of them have taken the rational economic decision to remain in Oman in hopes of finding more lucrative employment or, alternatively, a lower-cost option for departing.

BALTIMORE